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A D D R E S S

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

RHODE-ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

AT THE OPENING OF THEIR CABINET,

ON WEDNESDAY, NOV. 20, 1844.

BY WILLIAM GAMMELL,

PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC IN BROWN UNIVERSITY.

PROVIDENCE:
B. CRANSTON AND COMPANY.
1844.



PROVIDENCE, Nov. 21, 1844.

DEAR SIR:—At a meeting of the Rhode-Island Historical Society, held last evening, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to thank you for the Address which you yesterday delivered, on the occasion of the opening of the Society's new Cabinet, in Waterman street, and to request of you a copy for the press.

In communicating to you, Sir, the sentiments and wishes of the Society, the undersigned cannot refrain from expressing their earnest desire that you will not withhold from the public a production which sets forth, in a philosophic spirit and in language truly eloquent, the noble uses of History, and the important purposes which the Rhode-Island Historical Society is endeavoring to accomplish.

Respectfully, your friends and fellow citizens,

ALBERT G. GREENE, }
THOMAS B. FENNER, } Committee.
WM. G. GODDARD, }

WILLIAM GAMMELL, Esq.

PROVIDENCE, Nov. 22, 1844.

GENTLEMEN:—Accept my thanks for the exceedingly complimentary manner in which you have been pleased to communicate the request of the Rhode-Island Historical Society, for a copy of the Address delivered at the opening of the new Cabinet. Thoroughly interested as I am in the history of the State, and especially in the labors of the Historical Society, I cannot withhold a production, however unworthy, which, in their judgment, may increase the interest of the public in the useful and elevated objects to which those labors are devoted.

I am, gentlemen, with great respect and esteem,

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM GAMMELL.

MESSRS. ALBERT G. GREENE, }
THOMAS B. FENNER, } Committee of the R. I.
WM. G. GODDARD, } Historical Society.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY :

WE have come together to celebrate an event which may well form an era in the history of our society—the completion and opening of the chaste and commodious structure, which is henceforth to become the permanent depository of our collections for Rhode-Island history.—The occasion, though far removed from the exciting scenes that ordinarily occupy the attention of men in this bustling and restless age, is yet one which holds high and important connections with the dignity, the prosperity and the fame of the City and of the State. Let us then turn aside, for a brief time, from the engrossing occupations of every day life, to consider the purposes of our association, and, at this new altar, to kindle afresh our devotion to the objects to which it is to-day to be for ever consecrated. They are objects which intimately concern some of the best interests of society, and they earnestly appeal to some of the noblest sympathies of our intellectual and spiritual nature.

The care which preserves the materials for a people's history, is characteristic only of advanced stages of civilization, and a high degree of social and intellectual culture. The barbarous passions that crave merely present

gratification, and the engrossing spirit of trade, that heeds only the prospect of pecuniary gain, are alike unmindful of the connection that subsists between a nation's history and a nation's character. Wealth and power may rear costly monuments to the memories of the great; the bard of a rude age may celebrate in mythic verse the achievements of heroism and courage; but the collection of the scattered memorials of the past, the nice and discriminating research into its obscure recesses, and the writing of history, such history as may instruct mankind, these are never accomplished until society has made progress in social and moral culture, until out of the mighty mass of its baser passions and perishable interests there has sprung an intellectual spirit—a sense that craves a deeper wisdom than the voices of the living world can ever teach. It is then that we study the characters of the past, and reproduce them in the present.

“We give in charge
Their names to the sweet lyre. The historic muse,
Proud of the treasure, marches with it down
To latest times: and sculpture, in her turn,
Gives bond in stone and ever-during brass,
To guard them and to immortalize her trust.”

It is the appropriate object of an Historical Society to collect and preserve all the relics of the past, that may serve as materials for history. This object, when liberally prosecuted, cannot fail to exert the most salutary influences, not only upon those immediately engaged in its accomplishment, but upon the whole spirit of a community. It leads us along the checkered course of human affairs. It conducts us through the successive experiments that have been made in politics and morals; the changes of social condition, of language and of manners; the controversies that have agitated society, and the enterprises that have resulted in its comfort and improvement; and it brings to our notice all that has affected the

interests of humanity within the sphere to which it more especially relates. This object, in all civilized lands, has at all times been regarded as of the highest importance. Not only does its successful accomplishment ensure accuracy and completeness to the labors of the historian, but it also suggests innumerable topics to the philosopher and moralist, and sheds new light upon the mysterious problems of man's social progress and destiny.

But in this country, especially, the objects which associations like ours have in view, address themselves with still more commanding interest to the attention of the scholar and the citizen, and ally themselves even more closely with the well-being and improvement of society. I speak not now of the shadowy period which elapsed before the settlement of America began, fraught with curious interest, and fruitful of mighty problems though it be. The researches of the antiquarian traveller are just disclosing the burial place of its perished races, and lifting the veil of oblivion from the ruins of its wonderful civilization. Without reference, however, to this remote antiquity, so filled with mysteries and marvels, and so overwhelming by its vastness, there are subjects enough of transcendent interest, in the origin and progress of our own civilization, which has sprung up and borne its astonishing fruits upon these trans-atlantic shores. It is indeed of recent origin, but it is of peculiar character. It was engrafted upon this wild continent from the world's best stock. Its earliest eras are comparatively of yesterday; but its growth and development have been marked by great events, and illustrated by deeds and characters of the loftiest heroism. It has given a new continent to the dominion of the Anglo-Saxon race, and has opened here, for the language, the laws, and the religion of our British forefathers, the path to a destiny more glorious and sublime, than has ever been recorded in the annals of mankind. The origin and history of this peculiar civilization,

the early struggles it maintained with the perils of the wilderness and the hostility of savages, the virtues that adorned its character, and the men who pioneered its progress, these and all their innumerable relationships and results, are subjects that demand the careful and reverent study of the American people. That such subjects be thoroughly investigated and the memorials relating to them be carefully treasured up, may be of unspeakable benefit to the future fortunes of mankind. No toil, whether of hands or of minds: no expenditure, whether of effort or of wealth, that may be required to do this, will be bestowed in vain.

Nor is the influence which such inquiries exert upon the spirit and character of a people to be lightly estimated. It liberalizes their aims, breaks down their prejudices, elevates and ennobles their interests, and enlarges their sympathy with the changeful fortunes of the common humanity. The English moralist has well remarked, that "whatever withdraws us from the power of the senses, and makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings." Now it is precisely this influence which historic studies, above all other pursuits, are particularly fitted to exert. They serve to multiply the ties which bind a people to an honored ancestry, and to rally with new energy, their hopes and affections around the brilliant eras of their history, and the monuments which record the struggles of patriotism or the triumphs of freedom. They call back the buried forms, the forgotten achievements, the vanished scenes of a departed age, and cause them to move again, in a brilliant and impressive panorama, before the mind of the present generation. They thus mingle the interests and images of other times with the engrossing cares and pursuits that now occupy our attention, and, amid the wrecks of departed ages, they read to us lessons of the truest practical wisdom. By thus opening to the minds

of a people the fountains of their early history, may be best secured that unity of national character and that high-toned national spirit, which more than armies or navies, more than legislative codes or written constitutions, preserve from decay the institutions of a country. "These noble studies," as Milton has said of kindred pursuits, "are of power to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility." They interpret the prophetic voices of the past, and by clothing each familiar spot, each ruin, and hill-top, and river, with the associations of history, they increase and justify the feelings of veneration and pride with which the patriot clings to the institutions of his country.

No sooner does a nation become indifferent to her history, than her national spirit begins to decline. The chain of consanguinity which runs through successive generations and binds them in perpetual union, is broken asunder. The State, no longer venerated as a parent, is subjected to the experiments of wretched empiries, or, it may be, is turned adrift on the wild sea of revolution, with no principles of inherited wisdom to guide her, no lights of the storied past to shine upon her wayward course.—Modern times have furnished, at least, one memorable example of this truth, in the phrenzied struggles of revolutionary France, and that one example, it may be hoped, is enough for all ages. It seemed as though to her, her whole previous existence as a nation were utterly useless, and almost as though time had rolled his course in vain. In her proud self-conceit, she heeded none of the lessons of her own, or of others' experience. From the ages of her national glory, from the brilliant rallying-points of her history, she turned away, in contempt, to pursue the glittering phantoms of an upstart, impracticable philosophy. The altars of her ancient religion she threw down, and from the proudest spots of her soil, she removed the monuments of early patriotism and valor, hallowed by the associations of

centuries, that she might set up there the blood-stained emblems of her fanatical, atheistical republic. It was said by one of her own statesmen, with almost literal truth, that "you might alter the whole political frame of the government in France, with greater ease than you could introduce the most insignificant change into the customs or even the fashions of England."

But the labors of an Historical Society are of more particular benefit in their specific connection with the office of the historian. Their object is to provide the materials of which history is to be composed. In this country, especially, this is a work which private associations must do. The government, whether of the States or the nation, has hitherto done but little to rescue from oblivion the minuter materials for our national history. They must be discovered and brought together, and prepared for the historian's use, by private efforts alone, or they will perish forever. It is thus only that the narratives of American history can be raised to that higher standard of truth and accuracy, which shall make them faithful exponents of the real progress of the nation. Lord Bacon has remarked, that "nothing is so seldom found among the writings of men, as true and perfect civil history." And the remark is scarcely less applicable to the writings of our own age, than of that in which it was uttered. A part, however, of the imperfection which it implies, may be remedied, by a nicer and more discriminating research, a more careful collection and preservation of all the materials that can illustrate the spirit or the facts of an age or a nation.

But, after all, what is written history but the exponent and suggester of that which is not, and which cannot be written? The events that no pen records, always far outnumber those contained on the historic page; and there are a multitude of characters haunting the mysterious chambers of the past, whom no artist has ever sketched for the

picture galleries of history. This fact the historian must keep constantly in view, and he must write in such a manner as to concentrate and preserve the spirit of the whole in the part which he records. For this purpose, he must pursue innumerable investigations, whose results he cannot use; he must thread many a labyrinth of controversy which will not yield him a single fact, and he must study the lives and deeds of men whose names even, will not appear in the pages of his writings. It is only in accordance with this principle, that historical accuracy has ever been secured. Herodotus, the father of this species of composition, spent years in travelling over many lands, in conversing with their various inhabitants, in gathering up their scattered traditions and legends, and in extracting from them all, whatever could illustrate the times of which he wrote, ere he delivered his immortal work to his assembled countrymen, at the games of Greece. Gibbon devoted the enthusiasm of youth, and the best energies of manhood, to delving in the lore of classic antiquity. He studied the doctrines of every philosophic school, the principles of every art and every science, and "crossed and re-crossed, again and again, the gloomy gulf that separates the ancient from the modern world," and gathered the relics of many a perished race and broken dynasty, ere he was prepared to write the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. And the historian of modern Europe informs us, that his recent brilliant work on the French Revolution was the result of fourteen years of travelling and study, and of fourteen more devoted to the labors of composition.

There is also another respect in which the collections of an association like ours, are of essential service to the historian. It is not always the most splendid events that do most in moulding the character of an age, or in shaping the destiny of a people. The mightiest streams of political or of moral influence often spring from some humble fountain, embosomed in the retreats of private life, and

quite shut out from the notice of the mere general inquirer. To these sequestered places the historian must penetrate, by the aid of the minutest investigation, and of the most comprehensive generalizations. In doing this, his first resort is to the collections which others have made, to the materials which have been provided ready to his hand. He uses them and makes them tributary to the lessons he would teach, in accordance with the same high principle as that on which the philosophic astronomer employs the results of the humble observer who nightly watches the stars, and chronicles the silent changes through which they pass. As, in comparative anatomy, a single disconnected bone reveals to the naturalist the structure and habits of a race of animals that has been extinct for ages; so, often, the mutilated record of some forgotten manuscript, the neglected work of some ancient chronicler, will open to the historian the whole history of an age, and enable him to revive its spirit and exhibit "its very form and pressure." Thucydides has sketched, in glowing colors, the revolutions of the States of Greece; but could some Athenian letters, written by the patriots who lived during the terrific era he describes, now be rescued from the oblivion to which they have passed, they might reveal to us the scenes of Coreyra or of Corinth, the motives of statesmen and the springs of revolution, far more fully than they can now be gathered even from the pages of the most graphic of historians. And, to take a more familiar example, he who would thoroughly understand the social spirit and character of the early settlers of our own **PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS**, must have recourse not to the provisions of the first or the second charter, nor even to the records of the town alone, but to the scattered documents that describe their strifes with the people at Pawtuxet, and their endless disputes about bounds, and about the meaning of the famous words "up stream without limits," in the sachem's original deed; or to the singular paper which

Roger Williams submitted to the town, entitled "considerations touching rates." It is from these, and such as these, the incidental relics of things that have passed away forever, that the historian forms his conception of an age, and spreads it forth upon his pictured page.

But collections like these of which I am speaking, are not only of essential service to the historian ; they also enable the reader to verify the statements, to enlarge and extend the views contained in history itself. How many theories have been exploded, how many misrepresentations have been corrected, long after they have been chronicled in history, by the subsequent researches of more diligent or impartial inquirers ! Hume was for a long time regarded as the almost perfect embodiment of philosophical impartiality, and his "History of England" was read with universal delight, as the authentic narrative of the proud march of the English people from barbarism to civilization, through the checkered fortunes of their career. But the researches of later inquirers, and especially the publication of documentary details, relating to the more important periods of which he treats, have cast a shadow over his historic fame, which is growing deeper and deeper with every succeeding generation. The inimitable qualities of his style, and the charming grace of his manner, will long make his great work the delight of all who read English history ; but it is only when its errors have been corrected, its partial representations extended, its cold indifference to the interests of humanity animated with philanthropic sentiment and generous sympathy, that it becomes a safe guide to the true principles of the English Constitution, or the real fortunes of the English nation.

We may recur, for other illustrations, to the history of our own State, at a period within the recollection of some who are present to day. All are familiar with the fact that Rhode-Island was the last of the thirteen States to

adopt the Federal Constitution and to join the union which had been formed. But how small a portion of the real history of that event, is this single fact ! There is here no explanation of the causes of this reluctant assent ; no illustration of the influences which were at work to blind the people to the true dignity and happiness of the State. It is only when we leave the historic record, and go back to the scattered chronicles of the day, or converse with the aged men who still live to describe it, that we can form any adequate conception of the conflicting passions which then rent our little republic, on this engrossing question. Many a quiet citizen of the present day, who glories in the constitution of his country, would hear, with astonishment, of the strifes which agitated this State at the period of its adoption ; when town and country were in arms against each other, and military officers, and even legislators and judges, assembled with a rustic mob to prevent by violence the civil rejoicings which the success of the constitution in other States called forth among the people of Providence !

Other illustrations, without number, might be adduced, to show how much of our knowledge of the spirit and progress of a people, depends upon collecting and carefully treasuring up all the materials for composing, illustrating and explaining their history. But I need not dwell upon these familiar and well established views, respecting the importance of historic studies. In other countries, they have created a deep and wide-spread interest, they have received the fostering care of government, and have resulted in the accumulation of the most magnificent treasures of historic lore. The rich collections of the King's Library at Paris, of the British Museum at London, of the splendid libraries at Copenhagen and Göttingen, at Berlin and Vienna ; each containing, on an average, nearly 400,000 volumes, show how much has been done to keep the past from being forgotten, and to preserve all its impor-

tant facts and teachings, and even its evanescent spirit, for the future instruction and guidance of mankind. What event in the history of modern Europe cannot there be illustrated! What age cannot there be revived! The visitor to these stupendous collections of books and manuscripts, as he wanders amazed through their crowded alcoves, sees piled on every side around him, all that the diligence of man, aided by princely munificence and imperial power, has been able to rescue from the mighty wrecks of the past; and he feels a generous pride in the thought, that so much at least is safe, of all which gifted genius has created, or which the race of man has suffered and achieved, through the long centuries of its existence.

Our own country, though far behind the leading nations of Europe in her collections of books, has however begun to cultivate a most worthy and commendable interest in the monuments of her early history. Everything pertaining to the planting and the early growth of the settlements of America, has at length acquired a high value, and is becoming a matter of universal demand. It can now no longer be said that the richest collections of materials for American history are in foreign lands, shut up in the libraries of princes or of curious scholars, or sealed away in the Plantation Offices of the British government. They are here in the heart of New-England, where they have been gathered by the munificence of private citizens, and the enlightened agency of our literary institutions, and here they must remain forever.

The numerous Historical Societies which have been formed in this country, furnish also another most gratifying proof of the growing interest in all that pertains to American History. The Massachusetts Historical Society was founded in 1790. During the period which has since elapsed, it has published twenty-seven volumes of its Collections. It has accumulated, by its researches,

a library of books and manuscripts of immense value, and has set on foot inquiries and historic labors, whose influence has been felt in every part of the land. At later periods, similar societies have been established in the others of the New-England States, in New-York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, and Georgia, each one of which has contributed something for the illustration or the enriching of our local or general history. Of these, the society in New-York is by far the most liberal in its resources and aims, and the most active and diligent in its inquiries. It has published six volumes of Collections, pertaining to the history of its own State, and is at this moment prosecuting its objects, with a zeal and enterprise which give full assurance that all that has ever been achieved, in earlier or in later days, by the sturdy settlers of the New-Netherlands or their persevering successors, will be duly chronicled on the pages of American history.

But the history of no State in the Union, we may safely say, presents claims upon the attention and study of her citizens, so strong as does that of Rhode-Island. Her origin was peculiar, and her position among the States of New-England was marked, for many generations, by the same peculiarity. The three divisions of the State, the Plantations of Providence, the settlement at Aquetneck, and the settlement at Warwick, were first peopled by those who had been driven from the neighboring colonies for opinion's sake. Though differing in almost every other respect, they were entirely agreed in maintaining the one great principle which persecution had taught them, the inalienable freedom of the conscience, the underived, unchartered independence of the human soul. In others of their political and ethical opinions, they partook of the errors of their time, other interests of society they may even have neglected, but in their perception and application of this principle—the basis of all real freedom—they strode far be-

fore the age to which they belonged. They seemed to their contemporaries to be pursuing, with reckless zeal, a startling and impracticable paradox; but they felt, themselves, the greatness of the mission they were appointed to accomplish—to found a refuge for “true soul liberty,” to hold forth to mankind the first “lively experiment, that a most flourishing civil State may stand, and be best maintained, with a full liberty in religious concerns.” This noble purpose they adhered to with a tenacity that never yielded—with a consistency that never was marred, amidst the penury and the privations of the wilderness, amidst the scorn and the persecutions of all their neighbors. The colony, from the first, in the language of the settlers at Newport, was “a birth and breeding of the Most High.” Here, “beyond the chartered grasp of civilized man,” it was founded by “an outcast people,” who gloried most in “bearing with the several judgments and consciences of each other in all the towns of the colony.” In this consisted the peculiarity of Rhode-Island. In this, the fundamental principle of her society, she stood forth in the age, single and alone—*nec viget quidquam simile, aut secundum.*

This peculiarity in her early character, made her the object of incessant suspicion and distrust, and, at length, arrayed against her the combined legislation and proscription of all the other colonies of New-England. They chose to regard her as a heterodox, and almost as an outlaw State, whose interests and happiness they might prey upon at pleasure, and without rebuke. They laid claim to her territory, and extended their jurisdiction over her people, and well nigh crushed her in her very cradle. Massachusetts passed a law forbidding the inhabitants of Providence from coming to her towns, and when a respected clergyman of Newport, with two companions, went to visit an aged member of his church, resident at Lym, he was seized by the beadles of the town, while

preaching on the Sabbath, at the house of his friend, and was punished, under sentence of the court, by a heavy fine and imprisonment, with the alternative of being publicly whipped ! The fine was paid without the good man's knowledge or consent, and he was released from prison.— One of his companions, however, was still retained in confinement, and when set at liberty, was whipped with thirty stripes, inflicted with that merciless severity which heresy alone could have provoked. Under the operation of this exclusive policy, which was adopted by the neighboring colonies, the inhabitants of Rhode-Island were not only cut off from the trade of the country, but were often obliged to forego the comforts and the common necessities of life. This hostility, which, from the beginning, had characterized the intercourse of the other settlements with the fathers of Rhode-Island, in 1643, was embodied in the confederacy which was established among the colonies of New-England. The leading object of this confederacy was the mutual protection of its members against the Indians, whose hostility was threatened on every side, and against the rising settlements of the French and the Dutch, with whom England was then frequently at war. The circumstances of its formation are worthy of a moment's particular consideration. The contracting parties to the league, were the colonies of Massachusetts and Plymouth, of New-Haven and Connecticut, each of which, by its Commissioners, signed the articles at Boston, on the 19th of May, 1643. This union, Rhode-Island was not invited to join, and subsequently, at her own application to be admitted a member, she was *deliberately refused admission* ; an act which, taken in all its circumstances, stands out among the most unchristian and inhuman, recorded in Puritan history, in whose strange records are so often blended the direst atrocity and the loftiest virtue. Here was an infant, feeble colony, situated between two powerful races of savages—the Wampanoags on the east, and

the Narragansetts on the west—and separated by the wide Atlantic, from the mother country. Its people were of the same Anglo-Saxon stock, and professed the same protestant faith with their neighbors. They had come from England in the same ships, which bore the colonists of Plymouth and Boston, of New-Haven and Hartford. Like them, they had lighted the fires of civilization in the wilderness, and, by their beneficent influence with the Indians, they had, more than once, saved the whole country from the desolations of savage war. Yet it was all in vain. They had adopted the startling heresy, that men are responsible for their opinions, to God alone—that the civil power may not interfere in religious concerns—and that before the law of the land, all should alike be equal—whether Protestants or Papists—whether Jews or Turks. For this opinion, which they had dared to proclaim, and to carry into practice, they were placed beneath the ban of universal proscription, and were deliberately excluded from the alliance and the sympathies of the whole civilization of the country—to perish, it might be, from the wastings of starvation and disease, or amid the terrors of Indian massacre and conflagration.

At a recent celebration of the era of this confederacy, in a neighboring State, a distinguished and venerable orator* discoursed, with more of rhetoric than of truth, concerning what he was pleased to term “the conscientious, contentious spirit” of the early fathers of Rhode-Island. But to what manner of spirit shall we attribute this act of the Puritans of New-England, by which a christian colony, of their own brethren, was deprived of all the benefits of their neighborhood, and left unprotected in the wilderness, to contend with merciless savages, and struggle alone “against necessity’s sharp pinch!” Was it mere indifference to the fate of those whom they deemed heretics and outcasts? Or was it the

* See Note A.

vain hope, that by the pressure of want, or the threats of Indian massacre, the colony would yield to her confederate neighbors, and quietly submit to be partitioned among their several jurisdictions? Whichever of these may have been the motive, the act itself bespeaks a dark and malignant bigotry, which cannot be veiled, and for which it is in vain to apologize—a bigotry which, indeed, need not be dwelt upon, amid the general blaze of Puritan virtues, but which we may well be proud to think, has left no traces of its existence in the history or the character of Rhode-Island.

How different from all this, is the spirit which characterized *her* legislation, even at the same gloomy periods of New-England History! In turning to consider it, we seem to have advanced a whole age in the progress of civil and intellectual freedom. Take a single illustration. In 1656, Massachusetts commenced the persecution of the Quakers, which soon extended through all New-England. Banished from every other Colony, they fled to Rhode-Island, where, though they had but few sympathies with the inhabitants, they were kindly received, and were admitted to all the privileges of citizens and freemen. But the Commissioners of the United Colonies hunted them even here. In two several appeals, they urged the authorities of this colony, by every motive which could be addressed to the self-interest of a community, to join in the general persecution. But with what dignity does the Legislature reply: “As concerning these Quakers, (so called,) which are now among us, we have no law whereby to punish any for only declaring, by words, their minds and understandings, concerning the things and ways of God, as to salvation and an eternal condition.” And, when finding all persuasives vain, the Commissioners, irritated at her inflexible adherence to her noble principles, threaten to suspend all intercourse, and thus dry up the very sources of subsistence to the colony, the Assembly calmly make

their appeal to "his Highness and honorable council" in England, and, through their agent, ask that they "may not be compelled to exercise any civil power over men's consciences, so long as human orders, in point of civility, are not corrupted or violated; which," say they, "our neighbors about us do frequently practise, whereof many of us have *large experience*, and do judge it to be no less than a point of *absolute cruelty*."

Now, look along the history of mankind, up to the latter half of the seventeenth century, and where else do you find that language like this had ever proceeded from a legislative assembly? Yet, strange to say, the age was pre-eminently distinguished for its attention to religious truth and to the rights of conscience. England was rent by civil wars, of which these rights were professed as the sustaining principle. Her people were divided into four great parties, the Roman Catholics, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians, and the Independents, all of whom were contending for what they called *freedom of conscience*; and many a noble spirit had been offered up as a sacrifice to the cause, on the scaffold, or on the field of battle. Here, too, upon the barren coasts of New-England, were hardy settlements, just springing into vigorous existence, each of which had been planted for the *freedom of the conscience*. Yet, on a closer inspection, the freedom which all were pursuing, proves to be freedom only for themselves, not for others. It was freedom to rear their own altars and to offer their own worship. Beyond this it did not go. And the student of history turns from them all; from the religious parties then struggling for ascendancy in England, and from the colonies which had sprung upon the shores of America, and finds here alone, in a colony which had been neglected by her mother and despised by all her sisters, the solitary refuge for true soul-liberty—that unlimited intellectual freedom, higher than mere toleration—which makes all opinions equal in the eye of

the law, and which forbids the civil power to touch the inviolable sanctuary of the conscience.

Thus peculiar—far more so than has been generally understood—was the spirit of the early fathers of this State. The memorials of their labors, of their legislation, of their sufferings for the maintenance of this principle—which they alone of all the world, understood and cherished—are worthy of the minutest inquiry. They cannot be too thoroughly explored, or too carefully treasured up in the depositories of historic lore.

But, in addition to the greatness and value of the principles at issue, there is another consideration, which urges us perhaps, still more strongly, to the careful collection and preservation of the materials, especially for our early history. It is found in the fact, that these principles, and the characters of the men who here asserted them, have been singularly misrepresented and misunderstood. The literature of New-England, at that day, was confined to Massachusetts and Plymouth, and their early annalists seem never to have dreamed, that a faithful narrative of the planting and growth of this heterodox colony, where all sorts of consciences were tolerated, would ever be of the slightest interest or benefit to mankind. Hence it happened, that our early history became known to the world, mainly through the imperfect sketches of Winthrop or Hubbard, the prejudiced statements of Morton, the controversial sarcasms of Mr. Cotton, and the ridiculous, and sometimes vulgar jibes, of Cotton Mather. Many of these misrepresentations have been corrected by subsequent writers, in the same States from which they emanated; and the fame of Rhode-Island has been brightened by their labors. But she still appeals to her own sons, for a fuller vindication—she claims it for the lessons she has taught them—for the inheritance of freedom she has transmitted to them. From these eminences in her social progress, to which she has attained, she points us back to the

scattered graves of her original Planters, and demands of us that we build monuments to their memory—that we guard their fame, and transmit their principles, undisguised and unperturbed, in the imperishable records of history.

Among these early fathers of the State, I may here mention one, whose fame has been too much neglected, but whose character has descended to us, in the memory of his deeds, embalmed with the purest associations of devoted patriotism, and exalted virtue. I refer to Dr. John Clarke, of Newport—the associate of Roger Williams—the procurer of the second Charter—the tried friend of the colony, at a time when friendship for her was the sacrifice of all else that New-England had to bestow. His life ought long ago to have been written, and every lineament of his pure and spotless character, on which even enmity and envy have fastened no reproach, should have been held forth to the respect and admiration of those who enjoy the fruits of his labors. A scholar, bred probably at one of England's ancient Universities—a physician, accustomed to the practice of his profession in the circles of the British Metropolis—a teacher of religion, despised and persecuted by those among whom he had cast his lot—he came hither, the mild and benignant advocate of religious freedom, and, next to the exiled founder of Providence, was the truest friend, and the most generous benefactor of Rhode-Island. For twelve troubled years he resided in England as the representative of the colony, supporting himself during all this period, by his own labors, and by the mortgage of his estate in Newport. He was an intimate associate of many of the eminent men of the time, and was doubtless a witness of many of the stirring scenes of the English revolution. By his unwavering fidelity, by his winning manners, and his diplomatic skill, he maintained the rights of the colony, amid the changes and tumults of a revolutionary age, and at length, upon the restoration of the Stuarts, he succeeded in obtaining from the second

Charles, that Charter of civil government, which has shaped the institutions of the State, and identified itself with all her glory. The disinterested benevolence which had animated his life, still lighted up its closing hours. He died at Newport, in 1676, and, in his last will, bequeathed a handsome estate "for the relief of the poor, and the bringing up of children unto learning."

"Peace to the just man's memory—let it grow
Greener with years, and blossom through the flight
Of ages; let the mimic canvass show
His calm benevolent features; let the light
Stream on his deeds of love that shunned the sight
Of all but Heaven; and in the book of fame,
The glorious record of his virtues write,
And hold it up to men, and bid them claim
A palm like his, and catch from him the hallowed flame."

I have referred more particularly to the early periods of the history of Rhode-Island, in illustrating the peculiarity of her position, and the value of her fame. But other periods are equally replete with historic interest, and present scarcely fewer claims upon the attention and the study of her sons. Her participation in the struggles of the Revolution has not yet been fully told. All that may illustrate the services she rendered the cause of national independence, whether by legislation or by arms; all that embodies the spirit that made her the nursery of heroic commanders and of brave troops; and all that may explain her reluctant adoption of the Federal Constitution, or the origin and growth of her great social interests—her commerce and her manufactures—her education and her religion—all these should be faithfully explored and carefully garnered up, away from the reach of oblivion.

There is also another period, equally important to the fame of the State, and it may be equally instructive in its lessons for mankind, the memorials of which we, of the present generation, are especially bound to preserve from decay. I refer to the recent civil controversy, whose

furious passions have scarcely yet died away. Whatever may be the opinions we entertain respecting it, all will admit the importance of treasuring up every thing that can explain its origin and issue, or illustrate its spirit and character. We owe it to the State, whose bosom has been rent, and whose peace has been disturbed—and we owe it scarcely less to the nation, whose interests are involved in the principles at issue, to see to it that its history be faithfully written—not with the pen of partisan passion, or beneath the narrowing influence of political prejudice; but that it be written in the light of the Constitution, with the spirit of calm philosophy and discriminating research. Let every thing pertaining to it be carefully preserved, that, when in a future age, after our petty interests shall have perished, and our short-lived passions shall have died away, the historian shall come to trace the causes of these unhappy strifes, he may find here the means of thoroughly understanding the principles at issue between the contending parties, and the spirit and the acts that have marked the character of each, as well as the issue that has sprung from the angry passions that have been so deeply stirred. Thus let the cause be committed to the tribunals of posterity. Let there be materials for removing every blot that may have been cast upon the escutcheon of the State—of refuting every calumny that has been uttered against her fair fame—that the truth, the simple unvarnished truth, may alone be committed to the records of history.

For purposes such as these, has the Rhode-Island Historical Society been established. It dates back to the year 1822, and in the order of time it was the fourth institution of the kind established in the United States. It owes its origin to the spirit and activity of a few true-hearted sons of Rhode-Island, who chanced to meet in the office of a gentleman,* whose historic zeal, even then

* Hon William R. Staples, Author of the "Annals of Providence."

distinguished, has since led him onward to the most commendable labors, and the most valuable results. It was in the course of their conversation that the suggestion was first made of a Society, whose aim should be to collect and preserve, for the use of the historian, the scattered memorials of the successive periods of our progress as a Colony and a State. The suggestion was speedily carried into effect, and this Society commenced its useful career. Twenty-two years have since elapsed, and, amidst many discouragements, it has gone steadily forward in the prosecution of its worthy aims. Though it has never occupied a conspicuous place in the public estimation, and its active supporters have always been few, yet it has already done essential service in the illustration of the spirit and the characters that belong to our early annals. It has published five volumes of its Collections, and has garnered up in its archives a large mass of materials, which have already rendered valuable aid to writers of American history, and among which the future historian of the State or of the country, will find all that now remains of many a forgotten era of the past. Through the agency of a succession of indefatigable Secretaries and Directors, the Society has maintained an extensive and useful correspondence with similar associations in this country and in foreign lands. Its correspondence has rendered signal aid to the antiquarians of Denmark, in their attempts to decipher those mysterious inscriptions upon the rocky shores of New-England, which seem to point back to the visit of some unknown voyagers, centuries before the heroic enterprize of Columbus. The aid which was thus received has been acknowledged with grateful applause by this learned association, in the *Antiquitates Americanae*,—the magnificent work, in which they have embodied their researches respecting the ante-Columbian periods of American history.

After many efforts and long delays, the Society, aided in

part by private munificence, has at length been able to rear the modest structure, whose completion we have to-day come up to celebrate. We have watched its progress, from its commencement to its final consummation. In hope and in joy, we now set it apart to the purposes for which it has been erected. We dedicate it to the muse of history—"the muse of saintly aspect, and awful form," who ever watches over the fortunes of men, and guards the virtues of humanity. We wish it to be a place of secure and perpetual deposit, where, beyond the reach of accident, or the approach of decay, we may accumulate all the materials for our yet unwritten history. We would gather here, all that can illustrate the early planting, or the subsequent growth of our State—the lives of its founders and settlers—the manuscripts of its departed worthies—the history of its towns—its glorious proclamations of religious liberty, and its heroic sacrifices, both in peace and in war. We would also gather here, the few remaining relics of the long perished race of Canonics and Miantonomo, and keep them as precious memorials of men, who, though untaught in the lessons of civilized benevolence, received to their rude hospitality, the fathers of the State, when christian pilgrims persecuted and banished them. We would also deposit here, every thing that is connected with the interests of society within the limits of the Commonwealth—the chronicles of every controversy—the organs of every party—the wretched sheet, that in its day was too worthless to be read, if so be it illustrate the morals, the manners or the deeds of the time—and the most valuable volume in which genius and wisdom have embodied their immortal thoughts. We may hope, too, that within its alcoves, "rich with the spoils of time," may at length be seen the features and forms of the men, who in peace and in war, have reflected honor on the State, by the wisdom they have carried to the councils, or the glory they have added to the name of the country. Thus, distant genera-

tions may come up hither, and, while they study the memoirs of the past, they may gaze upon the lineaments of the men whose names they have learned to identify with whatever is heroic in action, or dignified in character.

It is to these objects, and to others such as these, that we dedicate this edifice,* which we have reared in this friendly neighborhood of learning, as the depository of historic lore. They are liberal and noble objects, and worthy to command the respect, and enlist the efforts, of an enlightened community. They are limited to no local bounds. They embrace the whole territory of the Commonwealth, and concern as intimately the settlements on Rhode-Island—the asylum from persecution at Warwick—the romantic legends of Mount Hope and Narragansett, as they do the Plantations of Providence. Whether they are ever fully accomplished, will depend on the efforts which the members of this Society put forth, and upon the sympathy and aid which we receive from our fellow citizens throughout the State. We invite, therefore, the co-operation of all, in carrying forward the work which we have begun, and of which so much remains to be accomplished. The State is the common parent of us all, and her fame should be dear to us all. That fame, which two hundred years have established, has at length been committed to us, to guard and to perpetuate. Let us be faithful to the trust: and in the temple which literary genius may rear to American History, let us erect an humble shrine, and dedicate it to Rhode-Island, and adorn it with her stainless escutcheon of **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**.

* See Note B.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

THE Second Centennial Anniversary of the New-England Confederation, was celebrated by the Massachusetts Historical Society, at Boston, on the 29th of May, 1843. The Discourse on this occasion, was delivered by Hon. John Quincy Adams. In speaking of the several colonies that composed the confederation, the orator was obliged, of course, to refer to the exclusion of Rhode-Island. He does this with all the adroitness of a skillful apologist for a shameful transaction. He simply mentions the fact, that she was refused admission into the New-England Union, without noticing the circumstances in which she was placed, or giving any opinion of the treatment she received. The following, is the passage to which allusion is more particularly made, in the preceding Address :

“ But there was yet another—a fifth New-England colony, denied admission into the Union, and furnishing in its broadest latitude, the demonstration of that conscientious, contentious spirit, which so signally characterized the English Puritans of the 17th century, the founders of New-England, of all the liberties of the British nation, and of the ultimate universal freedom of the race of man.”—p. 25.

In the paragraphs immediately succeeding this passage, Mr. Adams presents a view of the events that led to the banishment of Roger Williams, and to the settlement of Rhode-Island, which is believed to be peculiar to himself, and which cannot be regarded otherwise than as exceedingly partial and inadequate, and as partaking of a license, quite beyond “the freedom of history.”

It would be difficult to determine, in what sense the conduct of Roger Williams can be termed an “insurrection,” or an “insurrection to rebellion ;” and equally difficult, to ascertain what standard of humanity Mr. Adams had in his mind, when he vindicated the wintry exile of the Founder of Rhode-Island, as “mild treatment.”

NOTE B.

CABINET OF THE RHODE-ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This edifice, which is intended to be the permanent repository of the collections of the Rhode-Island Historical Society, is situate on Waterman street, in the immediate neighborhood of the Colleges belonging to Brown University. It is placed upon one of the most eligible sites in the city of Providence, commanding a delightful view of the University grounds, and, while easy of access, is more than usually exempt from the dangers of fire.

The dimensions of the Cabinet, are as follows: thirty feet six inches front, by fifty feet six inches rear, and twenty-nine feet high from the ground to the top of the cornice. The base of this edifice is of granite, but the walls are of rubble stone, stuccoed and colored, to represent granite.

The interior is very neatly finished, the whole being stuccoed, and ornamented with an entablature. The principal room contains galleries on three sides. Under the front gallery are two rooms, ten feet by twelve each.

The lot of land on which the Cabinet stands, is eighty feet by one hundred feet, and is handsomely graded. It is enclosed by a substantial fence, and is decorated with trees, which, in the course of a few years, will give to the building an air of classic repose.

The edifice was planned and built by Messrs. Tallman & Bucklin.

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